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ABSTRACT

Four school buildings encompassing a total of 11 open instructional areas were subjected to the clinical method or participant observation mode of inquiry. Two interrelated conclusions regarding the open space design resulted: (1) a distinguishable variation in administrative strategies existed when each group of teachers developed its own style, and (2) administrative decisions precluded utilization of the structure as planned. Additional cases must be studied, and data regarding the impact of classroom density and central office scheduling must be accumulated. As these data accrue, comparisons and contrasts can be made. The cumulation of such cases is viewed as the contribution of educational anthropologists to the theory and practice of education and, in particular, to educational innovation. (Author/MLF)

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Dilemmas in Educational Innovation: A Problem for Anthropology as Clinical Method[1,2]

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EA 003 353

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Issues and Assumptions

Some years ago, for reasons I have long since forgotten, I read The Doctors Mayo, a biography of the brothers and their father and an account of the developments of the Mayo Clinic. To a social scientist many aspects of the book are quite relevant: the origins of a very influential organization, insight into the medical analogy which has run rampant in psychology and education, and the development of surgery as a specialized technology. One particular episode from the book has stayed with me. In the words of the biographer, Helen Clapesattle:

> By the spring of 1888 Dr. Will (Mayo) felt that his experience with appendicitis was worth reporting, and he prepared a paper on the subject which he read before the surgical section at the annual meeting of the Minnesota State Medical Society.
>
> Conservative though its conclusions were, Dr. Will's paper made his listeners sit up in surprise at its thorough survey of the subject and the amount of personal experience it revealed.
>
> Ordinarily one or two cases of an uncommon malady were enough to occasion a report to the state society, and on perityphlitis, as it was still generally called, only two such reports of three cases had been made previously. But this mere lad from Rochester had illustrated his points with nine case histories, and some of these he said were typical of several others of the same sort. He must have treated a score or more altogether!...
>
> There, in one sequence which it has been possible to reconstruct in fairly complete detail, is an almost perfect miniature of the pattern of action and circumstance that made the Mayo brothers world-famous surgeons. (p. 135-136)

The accumulation of carefully described case histories and a gradually enlarging conception of the phenomenon were essential ingredients of the clinical method as they practiced it.

The analogue to educational anthropology is what I want to pursue today. It has both methodological and substantive implications. To move into the discussion I need to make several assumptions, several of which are open to considerable debate.

1) First, and perhaps most debatable, the field of educational practice is closer to the state of 1890 medicine than to present day medicine, engineering, or general technology.

2) Direct qualitative observation of complex social phenomena is a potent and frequently underestimated methodological stance.

3) The core of anthropological method is participant observation, a form of direct qualitative observation.

4) Anthropological research is essentially case study research.

5) In medicine and elsewhere, collection of cases and subsequent induction is a major part of clinical method.

6) Most anthropologists define their cases so broadly and pursue them so intensively that they cannot cumulate cases.

7) This inability to cumulate cases has some far reaching and potentially tragic consequences for education and educational anthropology.

Cumulating Cases: Open Space Architecture

Open space school architecture, and the accompanying instructional strategies, present some interesting dilemmas to educational practitioners. It provides the substance of the illustration that I want to use to develop the case study ideas implied in the foregoing assumptions. It represents a major innovation within education and one that will be with us for some time, in as much as concrete bricks and mortar have a kind of longevity. Initially we got involved in open space design by chance, for we were doing an intensive case study of the Kensington Elementary School, a new school with a faculty new to the district, new to the school, and new to each other. Our account of this we have reported elsewhere as Anatomy of Educational Innovation (Smith and Keith, 1971). It happened that the school architecture was radically innovative, open space loft type areas in the classically simple lines and angles of Greek architecture. The school organization was such that we were presented with four instructional teams in four open space areas. For some purposes, we can argue that while we have only one school we have four quasi independent cases of open space and instructional strategies. However, at that time we were not thinking in those terms.

Then, a year and a half ago, another happy accident occurred. A local architect, who had been designing open space elementary schools and who had read some of our materials asked me to spend some time observing in two of his new schools, the Meadowland and the Riverbend. The manifest purpose was to find out how the open instructional space was being used. Both of these schools were quite small, one had three large instructional areas and the other had two. This ran our number of cases to nine. This fall we had an opportunity to visit one more school, Northeast Elementary, in which the architect had designed an addition with two more instructional areas. Our case accumulation had now reached eleven if we count open instructional areas, four if we count buildings or school districts, and two if we count architects. All were elementary schools.

If we plotted the amount of time we spent in the four buildings, our statistician friends would say we had a skewed distribution. At Kensington three of us were in the building all or a part of 247 days during the year. Eliminating the days the several of us overlapped we were there on 153 different days. On the other end of the distribution I was at Northeast Elementary School only for several hours on one day. In between on the distribution I spent part of several days at Meadowland and Riverbend. In each of the settings I combined direct observation of teaching, informal interviews with individual staff members (teachers, principals, superintendents, etc.) and group discussions with staff members. In addition I mixed conversations with the architect, conversations with other kinds of consultants, attendance at Board meetings, and so forth. The records included in situ field notes, dictated summary observations and interpretations, and documents of several sorts--pupil papers, building sketches, and architect plans. The main point I would make is that regardless of time spent (and minimal times are open for strong criticism as we ourselves have argued on other occasions), we have behaved carefully and prudently in observing, note taking, inferring and interpreting. In short, we have adhered to the best of our ability to the spirit of the participant observation mode of inquiry.

Results as Hunches:
Fictions, Debates and Issues in Open Space

Whether it's scientifically legitimate to speak of "results" from the use of our participant observation techniques, is open to some question, I suppose. It's probably better to stay away from "hypotheses" as well. Consequently I'll comment on some interelated "hunches" regarding debates and issues in open space design.

Administrative Strategies

One of the first patterns that emerged as we studied our cases was a distinguishable variation in administrative strategies. Our first study of an open area school, Kensington, illustrated an approach to the organization of teachers and pupils in which the teams of 2, 3, 4, and 7 were given groups of 60, 90, 120, and 180 elementary pupils. These large groups of children were then broken into smaller groups for particular learning experiences. The core of the approach involved multiple teachers responsible for large groups of children. Such a point of view might be called the *differentiated strategy*. It has several advantages and disadvantages as a means of organizing for team teaching and the utilization of open space.

In contrast, our inference from the current observations of Northeast School is that an *additive strategy* was being used. In this instance groups of pupils (usually 25-30) are identified as being Miss Adam's or Miss Brown's. The teachers are encouraged to develop cooperative teaching in whatever ways seem reasonable and sensible to them as they work together. The consequences of this approach seem to include (1) moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, (2) tentative exploration, (3) slower changes from traditional styles, (4) less risk taking, (5) higher probabilities of survival, and, probably, "success," although that is a very complicated descriptive and evaluative phenomenon. Meadowland also used the additive strategy. Riverbend seemed to have started with the differentiated.

Finally, we have found these administrative strategies embedded in larger innovative strategies. At Kensington the larger strategy was what we called "the alternative of grandeur," the whole system was shifted--building design, staff organization, curricular content, teacher-pupil instructional styles, outside consultant resources, goals of pupil learning, parental involvement and so on. No one aspect of change could be hindered by that frequent argument and rationalization "I couldn't do X because of W, Y, or Z." In effect, W, Y, and Z were contingent as well. Illustratively, the individualized instruction in social studies was to permit the P.E. teacher to individualize his instruction--and vice versa. The alternative of grandeur can be contrasted with what Etzioni (1965) has called the "gradualist" strategy. In our account of Kensington we presented considerable data and a number of hypotheses regarding the antecedents and consequences of the alternative of grandeur. My purpose here, however, is to indicate that the case study approach permits--demands--the description, conceptualization, and interpretation regarding various levels of administrative strategy.

Multiple Resolutions of Open Space: Basic Patterns of Utilization

One of the most striking generalizations concerning open space utilization is that each group of teachers develops to a high degree its own style. The reasons are less clear and require more data. In effect, there are multiple resolutions of the problem and opportunity of open space.

Standard Self-Contained Classes

As might be expected, some groups of teachers seem to utilize the open space area almost as though there were invisible walls separating the groups of children. In part this seemed to be a function of choice and of retreat, or trial and error, where joint patterns seemed less satisfactory. In short, they seemed to be functioning much more heavily as regular or standard self-contained classes except they were housed in an open area. Illustratively: (1) The station of each teacher and her pupils was carefully demarcated. (2) The teacher's desk was with her children's desks. The adjoining work rooms were utilized less and sometimes by itinerant special teachers and not as a conference room. (3) Teacher patterns varied for each "self-contained classroom" for at times there was total group instruction and at other times there was a small group on the carpet clustered around the teacher while others were engaged in seatwork. In this way intimacy and closeness were achieved. Also, sound problems were handled by having the kids sit on the floor while nestled behind a swiveled chalkboard. Such a pattern was dysfunctional when tests were needed and especially when writing was required.

The Expanded Self-Contained Classroom

Several groups might well be called "the expanded self-contained classroom." For a portion of the day it was as though they tried to take 60 or 90 children and teach them in a style similar to a total group recitation in a self-contained classroom. (1) All the children's desks were together. (2) In some settings a microphone-loudspeaker system and/or a lectern had been installed to facilitate each child's hearing. It suffered as a one-way system for the child's response often could not be heard by everyone. The fans of the central heating system complicated this problem in one area. (3) Teaching was partly specialized; science taught by one, social studies by another, and so forth. In some instances lessons were rotated by teachers every other day or according to some pattern. (4) Groups of children were drawn off to peripheral spaces, defined by a limited amount of modular furniture, for some instructional purposes. (5) Often teachers seemed pressed for time; the usual procedures, pupils score their own papers with review of difficult or misunderstood issues, tended to break down. (6) Problems of pupil attention and control existed on occasion in such arrangements for children on the periphery sometimes were "lost" and larger numbers of more difficult pupils were grouped together.

Enthusiastic Team Teaching

The "enthusiastic team" colloquially describes two of the eleven teams. The teachers were young, confident, and active. During my visits at Meadowland I had found that they enjoyed working together and found the team pattern desirable and stimulating. A number of particular observations elaborate this general impression: (1) team planning occurred as they talked informally off and on during the day; (2) heavy utilization of the office space off the main room as a place to study and store curriculum materials; (3) a willingness to let the other teacher or teachers handle "my" group on occasion; (4) a commonality among the teachers in style of teacher-pupil interaction; the teachers were both quite directive and quite sympathetic toward the children.

It is important to note that the cooperative teaching involved them only part of the day. Much of the instructional program was handled in the form of self-contained classroom activities.

A further major factor which needs more analysis is the shift from recitational type lessons and curriculum to project or unit types of curriculum for teaming activities. Social studies or science units wherein the children engage in differentiated reading, resource utilization, data collection, writing, construction and culminating activities were found feasible in some instances. The component teaching skills required, the guidance of individual children into meaningful work, and the coordination of teacher efforts would require considerable more data than I had available from Meadowland. This is a high priority item for our future work.

The Organization and Its Environment

One of the most interesting aspects of the Northeast Elementary School lies in the interdependency of open space flexibility in the broader context of environmental instability and hierarchical demands. The original and intended picture was this: (1) an open area of 2900 square feet designed for four teachers and 100 fourth and fifth grade pupils; (2) plans for cross-grade ability grouping. The realities were these: (1) population growth and overcrowding--environmental instability--resulting in the space being used by five teachers and 125 children. (2) Central office scheduling of itinerant art, music, and P.E. teachers was by grade level and precluded cross-grade grouping. (3) The density of the area, pupils/square foot, was so high that there was no place to move the bulky modular cabinets to rearrange the "flexible open space" on an hourly or daily schedule. (4) The teachers were all teaching self-contained classrooms even though several have specialities, e.g., in math and science.

In general, I don't know why all these things happened. I don't know how many aspects might be alterable. My point is that the case suggests a multitude of researchable questions, some of which can be answered by further observation of this open space, this school, and this district. Other problems demand observation and analysis of school architects' schemas, decision making, activity, and interaction. Finally, and in keeping with the main intent of the paper, additional cases must be accumulated regarding the impact of classroom density and central office scheduling in self-contained classes and other open space areas. As the data accumulate comparisons and contrasts can be drawn. Perhaps these efforts could even lead then to more productive use of experimental and survey methodologies. But that's another story for another time and perhaps for another audience.

Conclusion

If we had time, a number of additional issues might be raised; (1) selection of teachers for open space schools, (2) socialization and training procedures for teachers in their new environment, (3) specific building elements lighting and learning activities, corridors and pupil movement in open space schools, and so forth. But we don't have that time now. Consequently, let me conclude briefly.

As the course of our work has developed, we have gotten involved in a cumulated series of observational studies of innovative open space designs. By taking the correlated stances: "Open space utilization as a natural phenomenon" and "nonjudgmented observers reporting back to decision makers--architects, administrators and teacher educators," we evolved a set of data which seemed to be reminiscent of the best of clinical method as this has been recorded in fields such as medicine and in accounts such as the biographical study of the Mayo Clinic.[3] We think we have data and interpretations that many decision makers and interventionists find exceedingly useful and that cannot be collected as easily nor as validly by other kinds of social scientists using other kinds of methods. Putting these efforts in the context of "clinical method," the cumulation of cases, suggests some alterations in what we perceive to be the more usual behavior of educational anthropologists. By so doing we think the contributions of the educational anthropologists to the theory and the practice of education will be enhanced. Educational innovation, one of the icons of the day, is tragically in need of such help.

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[3]An interesting subproblem here is Glaser and Strauss' (1967) strong argument for multiple kinds of materials used in generating grandeur theory. Their attempt to legimate such "unacceptable sources" we strongly support as a much needed bit of originality.

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